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**Sullivan, Walter**

(1924–2006) CRITIC AND WRITER. A native of Nashville, Tenn., Walter Sullivan was graduated from Vanderbilt University in 1947 following his service in the U.S. Marine Corps as a lieutenant during World War II. In 1949 he earned an M.F.A. from the University of Iowa and returned to Vanderbilt, where he taught with great distinction for 51 years. Sullivan began his writing career as a novelist with the publication of *Sojourn of a Stranger* (1957), a historical novel set in antebellum middle Tennessee, and nearly 50 years later concluded it with his memoir, *Nothing Gold Can Stay* (2006). During the nearly 60 years that Sullivan published, he wrote in many modes—short fiction, textbook, literary criticism, and personal essays (especially reminiscence and tribute), as well as novels. He made himself into a man of letters who could write well in nearly any form of prose. He was best known as a critic, and his criticism has a philosophical and religious dimension that marks it distinctively as his own—original, not derivative. "Death by Melancholy" (1970), his best-known and most representative essay, contains these wise and eloquent words: "As writers, we have fallen victim to our own excesses, and a deep melancholy now grips our lives. We see that our new god, art, has failed us."

Sullivan's brilliance as a lecturer and teacher went hand in glove with his critical voice and manner. He was a man of uncommon grace, great panache, and unforgettable style both in person and on the page.

The bare-bones record of his publications yields three novels, including *The Long, Long Love* (1959) and *A Time to Dance* (1995), both of which are set in 20th-century Nashville; three books of critical essays that are by no means random collections; *Allen Tate: A Recollection* (1988); and many stories, of which there is unfortunately not a book-length selection. He edited two highly regarded books: *A Band of Prophets: The Vanderbilt Agrarians after Fifty Years* (1982), in collaboration with William C. Havard, and *The War the Women Lived* (1995), a collection of memoirs written by southern women about the vast range of their experience of the Civil War. His work in periodical form—short stories, essays, and reviews—chiefly appeared in the *Southern Review* and the *Sewanee Review*. His first two novels were published by Henry Holt; thereafter the Louisiana State University Press, which reprinted the novels, published his work. Finally, a book dedicated to him, *Place in American Fiction* (2004), and his *Nothing Gold Can Stay* (2006) were published by the University of Missouri Press.

Sullivan was a founding member of the Fellowship of Southern Writers and served as its chancellor from 2001 through the spring of 2004. He directed the Vanderbilt Literary Symposium for many years. He was a Ford Foundation fellow, a Sewanee Review fellow, and a Lamar lecturer at Mercer University. His Lamar lectures were published as *A Requiem for the Renascence: The State of Fiction in the Modern South* (1976). In addition to Mercer, Sullivan lectured at a wide variety of colleges and universities. He was named an outstanding educator in America in 1973.

His literary friends and acquaintances include a distinguished roll call of writers in and out of the South: John Crowe Ransom, Donald Davidson, Andrew Lytle, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, Eudora Welty, Cleanth Brooks, Lewis Simpson, Elizabeth Spencer, Walker Percy, Flannery O'Connor, William Hoffman, C. Hugh Holman, Louis D. Rubin Jr., George Garrett, Wendell Berry, and Fred Chappell, southerners all; and Malcolm Cowley, Paul Engle, Robert B. Heilman, Donald Davie, Wallace Stegner, Robert Lowell, and Denis Donoghue.

Although occasionally stereotyped as a late Agrarian and a southern conservative, Sullivan was more nearly what Lewis P. Simpson and Mark Winchell have deemed a Catholic modernist. His criticism was devoted in considerable part to such Catholic writers as James Joyce, Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene, Jacques Barzun, and J. F. Powers. He should be remembered as a good fiction writer, a superb and highly original critic, an eminently readable memoirist, and as a man of letters and teacher whose unmistakable stamp has made an enduring mark on our age, on the South and its literature, and on the profession of letters.

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